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The Was

Lee's Art Legacy Liv

BY TISH DAHMEN
Wave Staff Writer

Heber City has lost one of its finest treasures; Douglas Lee. For 28 years Lee worked in his frame shop and art studio, the House of Fine Arts at 301 Main Street. He was in the shop by 7 a.m. and home for dinner by 6 p.m. And, although his art dominates the walls of the historic house, his presence made just as strong of an impression on those who knew him.

Sadly for Heber City, Lee passed away on June 28, 2000, at age 57, after a valiant battle with cancer. Fortunately, he leaves behind a great body of work for this and future generations to enjoy.

Lee's House of Fine Arts is a landmark on Main Street. Gaye McPhie, executive secretary for the Heber City Chamber of Commerce, said of the frame shop/art gallery, "It is a fixture on Main Street. We'd hate to see it go." She added that she appreciat-

ed the way Lee always kept the frame shop supplied with the music that students needed for their studies.

"It saved people having to go into Salt Lake and Provo," she said.

McPhie remembers Lee as a quite and cordial man. "Everybody who knew him, loved him," she said.

McPhie said Lee "was a typical artist and kept to himself. This opinion of Lee was confirmed by his daughter, Bethany Lee. Bethany is operating the frame shop until the family decides how best to dissolve Lee's estate. Lee's other three children, Winston, Russell, and Merridy agreed.

"His art was the most important thing in his life," Bethany said. "He would spend as much time as

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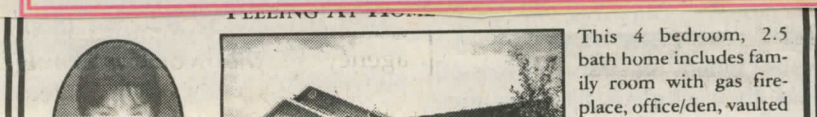
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An interesting fact about Lee is that he was "practically blind," Bethany said. Lee suffered several severe accidents as a child and was diagnosed with astigmatism in both eyes. For all his adult life, Lee only had the effective use of his left eye. Bethany added that five years previous to his death, Lee had eye surgery which greatly improved his sight. But, Lee's son, Winston, noted he was sensitive to light and actually painted in a darkened room.

Lee's art was unusually diverse. His preferred medium was acrylics used as water colors on 300-pound arches paper. He also painted on canvas. Exhibited on his gallery walls are pencil drawings and collages. His art ranges from impressionistic to the abstract to the surreal. He said of himself



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possible at his easel. He would be one of the first to arrive on Main Street and work in his studio until the shop opened, then come down and work on customers' orders. He would then go back to his studio and paint until called back down by a customer.

Bethany said Lee painted very few self-portraits. The ones he did do show himself in the background painting. Art objects and his subject matter are in the foreground.

Even as a young child Lee knew his destiny was to become a painter. Bethany said that when he was growing up in Vernal, Utah, Lee was always drawing. "At family parties he'd be missing. After a quick search someone would find him hiding under the table or someplace, drawing."

Lee had no formal art instruction before he went to the University of Utah. He graduated with a bachelor's of fine arts and started teaching. He taught art in Delta, Utah, Rangely, Colo., and Salmon, Idaho. Bethany said Lee did not want to pursue a teaching career so he moved his family to Heber in 1972, opened the frame shop and began painting in earnest. "The frame shop made a good living," Bethany said. "A good month, however, was one he'd also sell a painting." Bethany said the frame shop provided the basics for the family and Lee's paintings provided the luxuries.



that he liked to "paint on location and from imagination."

Winston said his father was afraid to get into a rut so he would push himself to do something different.

Artist Robert Duncan, of Midway, said Lee was an asset to the community. "He dedicated himself to depicting the Valley and spent many years trying to memorialize it in his art work." He added he respected the way Lee "stuck with the arts" even during lean times when art wasn't really supported. He also noted that during the 28-year history of the House of Fine Arts, there were times when it was the only place in town that displayed art.

At Lee's passing, the future of the House of Fine Arts is uncertain. The music studio portion of the house where Winston and Russell and their student teachers give

lessons will continue on. Winston and Russell moved their business, Crescent Music, into the old His and Hairs Salon at 55 West 100 South.

Bethany said she will continue to run the frame shop until Lee's estate is settled. In the meantime, the family hopes to show Lee's work at various art galleries. Currently the Wasatch County Library is featuring a small portion of Lee's paintings as part of their "Artist of the Month" series.

Bethany said it was "hard to sum up" the great body of work her father left behind. He had a powerful drive to create. Even in his teaching days he painted two to three hours a day. "He painted up until he died," Bethany said. "Dad told me he still had thousands of paintings in his head... all different."